



FACT SHEET

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

Chronic Wasting Disease has been detected in a 2 year old mule deer buck northeast of Vernal, Utah. The diagnosis was made during an intensified surveillance effort, which was initiated this last hunting season following the discovery of the disease in Colorado, just 30 miles from the Utah border. Until this single case, there had been no diagnosis of CWD in Utah in wild deer or elk or in private herds. The Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, the Division of Wildlife Resources, the USDA, and Utah Elk Breeders remain committed to preventing the introduction and establishment of the disease to Utah. The following points may serve to answer some of the questions that have arisen.

- ◆ Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is caused by an infective agent known as a protease resistant prion protein (PrP) and has been present in deer and elk in northeastern Colorado and southeastern Wyoming since the late 1960's. The disease has more recently been detected in wild deer in Nebraska, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Illinois, New Mexico, and the province of Saskatchewan.
- ◆ CWD has been detected in privately owned elk on 23 elk ranches in 7 states and several ranches in the province of Saskatchewan and one in Alberta.
- ◆ CWD damages the nerve cells of the brain and is one of a group of diseases classified as Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSE), which includes Scrapie, Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), Cruetzfeld-Jacob Disease (CJD), and others.
- ◆ There has been no evidence of natural transmission of CWD to other livestock or humans.
- ◆ Secretary of Agriculture, Ann Veneman, has taken the first step toward development of a federal program for the eradication of CWD in farmed elk by declaring a disease emergency. This allows access to funds for testing of animals felt to be at risk.
- ◆ The Utah Department of Agriculture and Food and the Division of Wildlife Resources, with funding support from USDA, has performed surveillance studies to check for Chronic Wasting Disease in Utah. A 2-year study in 1998-99 of over 750 wild deer and elk in Utah found no positive animals. Surveillance was intensified this past hunting season because of the discovery of CWD in western Colorado.
- ◆ The legislature approved the establishment of private elk farming in Utah in 1997. Since then, Utah has always required a statement from the ranch of origin that the elk are not infected with CWD and other diseases. A prior entry permit and Certificate of Veterinary Inspection which details the results of testing for disease and genetic purity is required for elk entering the state. Utah brand inspectors verify the entry and exit of elk from Utah elk farms and perform an annual inventory audit of the herds.
- ◆ In 1998, Utah initiated a program of voluntary testing for CWD upon the death of any farmed elk. Mandatory testing for CWD was implemented in 2000 at the request of the Utah Elk Breeders. No cases of CWD in Utah captive elk have been detected by that testing. A temporary moratorium on elk importation was instituted in July 2002 in response to the more widespread distribution of CWD.
- ◆ The Utah State Veterinarian has acted to prohibit importation of any elk from herds that are known to be positive for CWD and has prevented the movement of any elk that may have had exposure to an infected herd. He has requested CWD Emergency Disease funding from USDA for testing of all potentially exposed elk at the request of the Utah elk breeders.
- ◆ The Utah State Veterinarian identified 27 captive elk in 2000 that could have potentially been exposed to CWD prior to 1998 at a Colorado elk farm. One other animal could have been exposed in March of 2001. All 28 animals have been slaughtered and tested for CWD under a federal emergency program and found to be negative.